



INTRIGUING

# CHINESE CULTURE 1



Y H MEW



CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS



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# Preface

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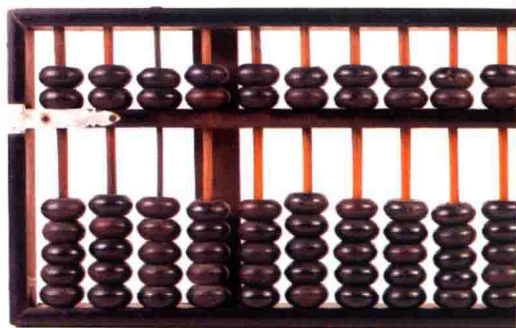
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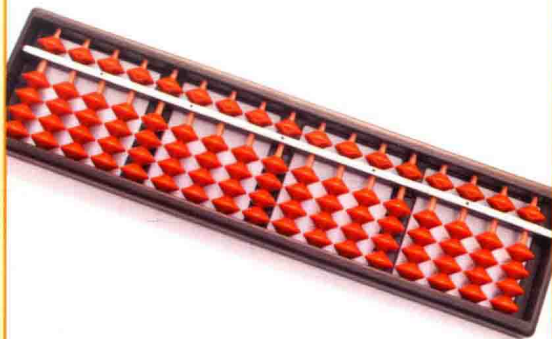
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# abacus 算盘 suàn pán

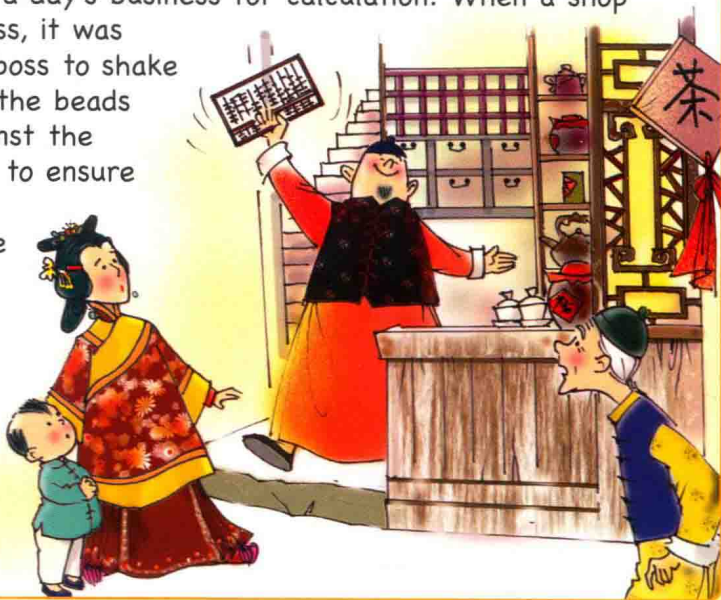
The abacus, invented by the Chinese a few thousand years ago, is an instrument for calculating. It has two sections: the top section has rods of two beads, while the bottom section has rods of five beads. The number of rods is always odd in number.



The Japanese abacus, modified from the Chinese, has rods of one bead in the top section and four beads in the bottom section.



Before the invention of the calculator, Chinese business people often used the abacus at the end of a day's business for calculation. When a shop opened for a day's business, it was common practice for the boss to shake the abacus hard, causing the beads to make a loud noise against the frame. This was supposed to ensure that the day's collection would be so good that the boss would be kept busy moving the beads along the rods at the end of the day.



The abacus is considered the 'mother' of all calculating instruments and continues to be used today, even though its role has been much overshadowed by the introduction of the electronic calculator.



## Idioms and phrases

算 suàn

to calculate

算命 suàn mìng

to tell one's fortune

算命先生 suàn mìng xiān shēng

fortune-teller

算数 suàn shù

arithmetic

算账 suàn zhàng

1 to do the accounts

2 to get even with someone

秋后算账 qiū hòu suàn zhàng

literally 'to settle scores after the autumn harvest'. This expression is used to describe a situation in which one party begins to deal with the other party only after the initial crisis is under control.

# addressing one's husband or wife 称呼 chēng hu

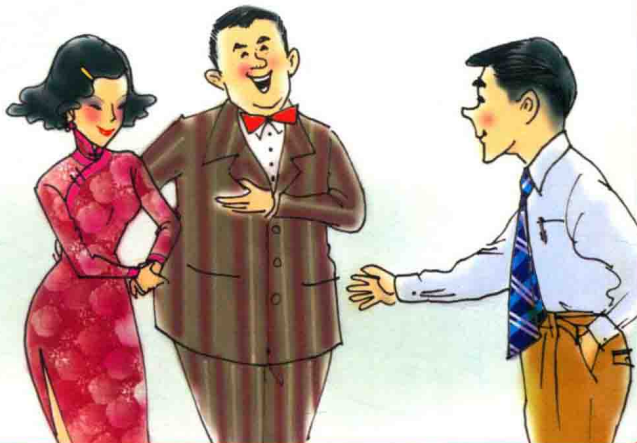
Over the centuries, the Chinese have adopted a number of different ways of addressing their spouses. In former times, for example, it was unusual for a husband or wife to call each other by name, especially in front of their own family. Instead, the husband would call the wife the 'children's mother' 孩子他/她妈 and

the wife would address her husband as the 'children's father' 孩子他/她爸.

Some people even addressed their spouse simply as 喂 (wèi, literally 'hello').



In more modern times, when introducing his wife to friends, a husband might refer to her as his 内人 (nèi rén, 'the domestic person'). Likewise, when a wife introduced her husband to her friends, she might refer to him as her 外子 (wài zǐ, 'the external person'). This reflected the customary role of the husband, who managed external matters, and that of the wife, who was in charge of domestic matters.



More informal and rather fashionable terms, used especially amongst friends, are *lao po* 老婆 (*lǎo pō*) for one's wife and *lao gong* 老公 (*lǎo gōng*) for one's husband. Since 1949 the term *ai ren* 爱人 (*ài ren*), meaning 'lover', has become common for both husband and wife, in much the same way as 'darling', 'sweetheart' and 'honey' are used between couples in the West. More formal terms are *xian sheng* 先生 (*xiān shēng*) for a husband and *tai tai* 太太 for a wife.



## Idioms and phrases

称呼 *chēng hu*

to address someone

称颂 *chēng sòng*

to sing praises of someone

称王 *chēng wáng*

to declare that one is king

称兄道弟 *chēng xiōng dào dì*

to call or treat each other as brothers

称赞 *chēng zàn*

to praise someone

# ancestor worship 敬祖 jìng zǔ

The Chinese have always treated their ancestors with great respect and taken care to observe all the rituals demanded by tradition. This remains the case regardless of social or educational background.

The awe for ancestors is due partly to belief in filial duty 孝 (xiào) and partly to the idea that by showing respect to ancestors, the living will secure their blessing 庇荫 (bì yìn, 'benevolent shade') with regard to their own health and prosperity.



Offerings to the ancestors are made every month. One of the most important occasions is the Qing Ming Festival, which is equivalent to All Souls' Day in the West. It falls in April each year. If the deceased were buried, the living go to the graveyard 'to sweep the grave' 扫墓 (sǎo mù), which involves clearing away any overgrown grass and cleaning up the grave and tombstone before praying.





In the case of cremation, the living will pray before the urn containing the ashes of the deceased. The prayers will be accompanied by offerings of fruit and food. Joss sticks and joss paper are also burnt.

## Idioms and phrases

敬 jìng

to respect; to honour

敬爱 jìng ài

beloved

敬酒 jìng jiǔ

to toast; to propose a toast to

敬酒不吃吃罚酒 jìng jiǔ bù chī chī fá jiǔ

The phrase 敬酒 means to toast, while 罚酒, in the Chinese drinking culture, means to drink as a punishment for losing a bet or game. This phrase may be used metaphorically to describe a person who refuses to do something when requested but then does it under pressure or force.

敬佩 jìng pèi

to admire

敬畏 jìng wèi

in awe of someone

敬重 jìng zhòng

to show great respect for someone